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THE
MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

A SUMMARY OF ITS PROGRESS DURING THE LAST SIX
YEARS AND A SURVEY OF FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

TOGETHER WITH
BUDGET ESTIMATES FOR 1921-23

DECEMBER, 1920

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PROGRESS OR STAGNATION—WHICH?

The high lights in the progress of the Minnesota Historical Society during the last six years may be summarized as follows:

The Society has moved from inadequate quarters in the Capitol to the magnificent new Historical Building.

Its library has increased in size over 30 per cent, mainly as a result of gifts.

Progress has been made in the recataloguing and classification of the library along modern lines.

Its service to readers and students has been trebled.

A manuscript division has been organized with a curator, and the most valuable of its manuscripts have been arranged and filed.

Additional manuscript collections of great value have been acquired.

The Society has been made official custodian of noncurrent state and local archives, and extensive and valuable collections of records and papers from the offices of the governor, the secretary of state, and other state departments have been taken over, arranged, and made accessible to students.

The museum has been organized as a separate division with a curator and an assistant.

The museum objects and pictures have been sorted, classified, listed, and arranged in exhibits so far as cases have been available.

Children's history hours and historic tours have been inaugurated.

A quarterly magazine, the *Minnesota History Bulletin*, has been founded.

Dr. Folwell's *History of Minnesota* has been edited and prepared for the press.

Two volumes of *Collections* have been published.

Thousands of people have been interested in state history and the work of the Society through lectures, newspaper and magazine publicity, and the distribution of publications—especially a *Handbook* of the Society recently issued.

The active membership has, without any extensive campaign, been increased over 40 per cent.

This progress has been made without any large increase in the appropriations to the Society. In fact, the purchasing power of those appropriations is considerably less at the end of the period than it was at the beginning. Only by the adoption of the following expedients has it been possible to make both ends meet:

Since 1916 the private income of the Society, consisting of receipts from dues and income from investments, has been drawn upon for maintenance purposes in ever-increasing sums, until now the limit has been reached.

Expenditures for books have been cut from nearly \$5,000 in 1913 to about \$1,500 for the current fiscal year, in spite of the higher prices of books. (The great increase in the library has resulted from gifts, not from purchases.)

Inadequate salaries have been paid to members of the staff—salaries considerably lower than those received by people of similar qualifications in other institutions or occupations.

The most rigid economy has been practiced in every possible way.

This year the binding of books, magazines, and newspaper files has been curtailed by postponing as much as possible to the better times hoped for.

The crisis has now been reached. If the progress of the last

six years is not to be lost, the Society must have more funds. It is asking the next legislature to increase the annual appropriation from \$25,000 to \$50,000. If this increase is made:

The Society will be able to make salary increases partly commensurate with the increased cost of living.

The completion and publication of Dr. Folwell's *History of Minnesota* will be pushed forward rapidly and a beginning will be made in the publication of important source material of Minnesota history.

All current books in the field of the library and some publications passed up during the lean years will be acquired.

The binding will be brought up to date.

The reading-room service will be improved and the books catalogued more promptly.

Additional exhibit cases for the museum and a stereopticon for the auditorium will be acquired.

The position of field agent will be revived, making possible state-wide search for historical material and stimulation of local historical activities.

If the appropriation is not increased:

The Society will be forced to cut its staff still further and to get along with untrained and incompetent assistants.

The completion of Dr. Folwell's *History* will have to be postponed indefinitely.

The book purchases will of necessity be restricted to a very narrow field.

The flow of gifts will have to be checked because it will be impossible to catalogue and care for them.

Material awaiting binding will accumulate in large quantities as a mortgage on the future.

Valuable manuscript collections will be permanently lost because of the inability of the Society to search for and acquire them.

In short, the Society will have to face the prospect of giving up its claim of being a scientific and educational institution and content itself with useless but inexpensive antiquarianism, while the relative position of Minnesota as compared with the other states in the matter of significant state historical work will sink lower and lower.

The table on the following page shows the expenditures of the Society for various purposes, from both the state appropriations and the private funds, since 1914, together with the budget estimates for the next biennium, as submitted to the Governor on December 1. The Explanation of Increases which follows the table was submitted along with the budget estimates.

MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY—COMPARATIVE BUDGET 1914-1923

| Year | 1914-15 | 1915-16 | 1916-17 | 1917-18 | 1918-19 ¹ | 1919-20 | Estimated 1920-21 | Proposed 1921-22 | Proposed 1922-23 |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|-------------|--------------------------|-------------|----------------------|-------------|----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| State Appropriation | | | | | | | | | |
| Services | \$13,569.13 | \$13,738.05 | \$14,757.00 | \$17,412.69 | \$16,762.82 | \$16,787.45 | \$17,998.33 | \$30,000.00 | \$30,000.00 |
| Publications | 2,777.74 | 810.31 | 1,565.64 | 1,193.94 | 1,361.78 | 3,213.61 | 3,000.00 | 8,000.00 | 7,000.00 |
| Other expenses | | | | | | | | | |
| and supplies | 1,879.39 | 1,061.19 | 1,131.83 | 1,697.53 | 1,908.97 | 1,778.12 | 1,600.00 | 2,500.00 | 2,500.00 |
| Books | 3,407.27 | 2,430.41 | 3,047.70 | 3,493.05 | 3,299.90 | 2,432.01 | 1,601.67 | 6,000.00 | 7,000.00 |
| Binding | 879.23 | 641.57 | 799.05 | 919.45 | 1,137.00 | 346.35 | 500.00 | 2,000.00 | 2,000.00 |
| Other equipment .. | 1,355.94 | 333.23 | 528.76 | 284.34 | 529.53 | 422.26 | 300.00 | 1,500.00 | 1,500.00 |
| Total | \$23,868.70 ² | \$19,015.16 | \$21,829.98 ² | \$25,000.00 | \$25,000.00 | \$25,000.00 | \$25,000.00 | \$50,000.00 | \$50,000.00 |
| Private funds | | | | | | | | | |
| Services | | | | \$ 3,725.00 | \$ 4,886.53 | \$ 5,474.56 | \$ 6,290.00 | \$ 5,700.00 | \$ 5,700.00 |
| Binding | | | \$ 1,706.90 | | | | | | |
| Miscellaneous | | | 6.75 | | | | 534.00 | | |
| Traveling expenses | | | 251.00 | 265.98 | 190.00 | | 101.00 | 300.00 | 300.00 |
| (field agent) | | | 199.11 | 155.17 | 35.58 | | | 300.00 | 300.00 |
| Total | | | \$ 2,163.76 | \$ 4,146.15 | \$ 5,112.11 | \$ 5,474.56 | \$ 6,925.00 | \$ 6,300.00 | \$ 6,300.00 |
| Grand total | \$23,868.70 | \$19,015.16 | \$23,993.74 | \$29,146.15 | \$30,112.11 | \$30,474.56 | \$31,925.00 | \$56,300.00 | \$56,300.00 |

¹ The fiscal year 1918-19 was only eleven months long. For purposes of comparison, these figures are calculated for twelve months by adding one-eleventh to the actual expenditures.

² The excess of expenditures over the appropriations of \$20,000 for these years was possible because of unexpended balances held over from previous years.

EXPLANATION OF INCREASES

SERVICES

An increase of about \$12,000 per year or about 66 per cent is requested for services. About \$7,000 of this sum is desired for increasing the salaries of the present members of the staff. This would permit an average increase of 40 per cent over present salaries or 50 per cent over the salaries paid in 1917-18—obviously less than the increase in the cost of living. It should be said that there was practically no increase in salaries between 1914 and 1917.

The sum of \$4,000 is desired to enable the Society (1) to restore two positions which have been dropped during the past two years because of shortage of funds; and (2) to provide for two new appointments—(a) a second reference assistant to help out with the reading-room service, for which the demands have more than doubled in the last two years, and (b) an additional assistant to help out in the catalogue department, which, in spite of decreased purchases, is unable to keep up with its work because of the large quantities of valuable material received as gifts.

The remaining \$1,000 is desired in order to make possible the employment of substitutes during vacations and of extra assistants when needed for special tasks and emergencies. This item, which was \$510.65 in 1919-20, was omitted from the budget for the current year because of the shortage.

PUBLICATIONS

The Society has in press at the present time volume 1 of a four-volume *History of Minnesota*, by Dr. William W. Fowell, first president of the University. This is a work of very great value. Of the first volume, only 1,000 copies are being printed now because of lack of funds; but the type will be held for one year so that more copies can be printed if suffi-

cient money is available in the next fiscal year. Volumes 2 and 3 will be ready for printing in 1921-22 and volume 4, in 1922-23.

In addition, it is expected that a volume of *Collections*, consisting of important source material for the history of the state, not now available in print, will be ready for publication in 1922-23. It is by means of publications that the Society can best make available the results of its work. In this field Minnesota is far behind the eastern states and the neighboring states of Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin, which publish as a rule three or four historical volumes a year.

The following schedule indicates the proposed distribution of sums requested for publications:

| Publications | 1921-22 | 1922-23 |
|---|------------|------------|
| <i>Minnesota History Bulletin</i> | | |
| (quarterly) | \$1,000.00 | \$1,000.00 |
| Folwell's <i>History of Minnesota</i> , I | | |
| (additional 1,000 copies)..... | 1,000.00 | |
| Folwell's <i>History of Minnesota</i> , II | 3,000.00 | |
| Folwell's <i>History of Minnesota</i> , III | 3,000.00 | |
| Folwell's <i>History of Minnesota</i> , IV | | 3,000.00 |
| Volume of <i>Collections</i> | | 2,750.00 |
| <i>Bicennial Report</i> | | 250.00 |
| | <hr/> | <hr/> |
| Total..... | \$8,000.00 | \$7,000.00 |

BOOKS

The expenditure for books, being the most elastic large item in the budget, has decreased to less than a third of what it was at one time, while the cost of books has greatly increased. The decrease of books purchased has been more than made up for, in numbers, by the increase in gifts, but these, valuable as they are, cannot take the place of books which can be secured

only by purchase and which are essential for a well-rounded library.

Unless considerably more money is available in the future for the purchase not merely of new books but also of those which would ordinarily have been acquired during the last few years, it will be necessary to restrict very greatly the present scope of the library. This would be unfortunate, in view of the magnificent collections in various fields of American history and closely allied subjects now in the library, but it would be better than attempting to cover the larger range in a superficial manner.

The appropriations asked for would enable the Society to maintain the scope of the library and to fill in some of the gaps, in so far as books not purchased when published are still in the market. It represents an increase of only 86 per cent over the amount spent for books in 1917-18.

BINDING

The situation with reference to the binding of books, magazines, and newspapers is serious. The cost of binding has doubled in the last few years and this, coupled with the general shortage of funds, has forced the Society to leave the bulk of its current magazines and newspapers unbound for the present. This greatly increases the work involved in consulting the files and the danger of damage to them, and they must be bound up as soon as possible if their preservation is to be insured. The appropriation asked for is estimated to be sufficient to care for the current binding of the biennium and also for that which has had to be postponed.

OTHER EQUIPMENT

Very little equipment has been purchased since the Society moved into its new building three years ago. Typewriters are

wearing out and must be replaced, a new desk is badly needed, and a stereopticon would add greatly to the services which the Society could render in connection with lectures, meetings, and children's history hours.

Additional filing equipment is essential for the proper care of valuable manuscript material, archives, card catalogues, and especially the Society's large and valuable collection of maps, which is practically unavailable because of lack of equipment. The need for additional museum cases is very pressing. Many valuable museum objects cannot be exhibited because of lack of cases, and people hesitate to present such objects under the circumstances. The museum is visited by over 25,000 people a year and the educational possibilities of its exhibits are very great.

GENERAL

The Society believes that its request for a doubling of its appropriation at this time is fully justified. As evidence thereof attention is called to the following facts:

Fifteen years ago Minnesota was in the front rank of the American states as regards appropriations for historical work. The annual grant of \$20,000 to the Society was the same as that received by the Wisconsin Historical Society and was exceeded in few, if any, states. Since 1905, however, the Minnesota appropriation has been increased only once—to \$25,000 in 1917—while other states have forged rapidly ahead, with the result that now not only Wisconsin, but also Illinois and Iowa spend about three times as much for historical work as does Minnesota, and few states of equal rank, as regards age and wealth, spend less.

In the meantime, the purchasing power of the dollar has decreased steadily and, during the last few years, rapidly. All investigators of price changes would agree that the purchasing power of the present appropriation is not more than half





as great as that of the appropriation of 1905; differently, the requested appropriation of \$50,000 a year represents a purchasing power little if any greater than that of the 1905 appropriation of \$20,000.

During this same period, moreover, the demands upon the Society by the general public have greatly increased. In 1905 it was just being installed in a few rooms on the ground floor of the New Capitol; today it occupies the magnificent Historical Building completed in 1918, but it finds itself in the position of the owner of a fine estate whose income is inadequate for its maintenance.

Opportunities for valuable work abound but they cannot be seized because of insufficient funds. Efficient reading-room service, the building up of the library, the making accessible of accumulations of uncatalogued books, the binding of magazines and newspapers, the proper care of valuable maps, manuscript collections, and archives, the continuation and development of the educational work of the museum, and the prompt publication of the remainder of Dr. Folwell's History—all these depend upon increased appropriations.